

Wives, Widows and Wimples Theme 11: The religious life

Document 1

**WLC/LM/38: Fragment of the Life of St Bridget (Brigid), from the 'South English Legendary', lines 5-25 and 39-59 (composed late 13th century, English)
Transcription by Gavin Cole. Translation by Pamela Doohan and Thorlac Turville-Petre**

First side

brigid

A seruant he hadde inis hous . brocsech
was hur name
þ is duptac by soȝte hure . of lechorie and
ssame
O n hure he byȝat a child . in spous bruche
and wiþ wou
þ o is owe wif hit vnder ȝet . sory he was
ynou
¶ M est heo dradde hure of þat child . þat
hit ssolde so wel yþe
T o sormonte hure owe children . hor
maister vorto be
þ er uore heo cride on hure louerd . to boe
ywar by uore
A nd sulle out of londe þe seruant ar þat
child were ybore
þ e hosebonde nolde hit grante noȝt . vor
he hadde loþ it do
þ is wif cride niȝt and day . ȝyf heo myȝte
hit bringe þerto
S o þat hit fel þer afterward . þat þis
hosebonde
W yþ his seruante alone wende . in acart
ouerlonde
¶ A chantor was þulke stude . as were by
olde dawe
A s our louerd hit wolde by is hous . þe
cart gan euene drawe
H e sat and hurde hou þis cart . by ys gate
wende
A non he clupede on of his men . and
hasteliche out sende
L okeþ he sede hasteliche . wat þing is þat
ich yhure
V or þe son of þulke woeles . is vnder agod
creature
þ e nobloste creature . is wiþ Inne þulke
tre
þ at is nouþe in eny londe . lokeþ wat hit
bee
¶ þ o ne fon[de] . hy in þis cart . namo
bote home to

First side

St Bridget

Duptak had a servant-girl in his house,
called Brosech, whom he desired
lecherously and shamefully. He begot on
her a child adulterously and sinfully. When
his wife found out, she was very sorrowful.
But she was most afraid of that child, in
case it should thrive so well as to surpass
her own children, and become their
master. Therefore she begged her lord,
Duptak, to take steps in advance and sell
the servant out of the country, before the
child was born. The husband [Duptak]
refused to grant this, because he was
reluctant to do it. His wife implored him
day and night, in the hope that she might
bring this about. So it happened later that
the husband travelled alone with this
servant, in a cart across country, to where
there was a sorcerer, as in olden times. As
our Lord would have it, the cart went past
his house. He sat and listened as the cart
passed his gate. He called one of his men
and quickly sent him out. 'Go and find out,'
he said quickly, 'what is it that I can hear.
For the sound of those wheels is beneath a
good creature; the noblest person
anywhere in the land is inside the wood.
[i.e. he divines that the unborn child is
inside the cart.] Find out what it is'. When
he found in the cart no more but two
[people] ... [the story continues: the
servant told the sorcerer he had lied to
him, but the sorcerer was able to see that
Brosech was pregnant, and therefore that
there were indeed three travellers]

Second side

bride

V or þis womman ssal a doȝter bere . þat
ssyne ssal so clere
A mong alle þat on erþe bep . in as cler
manere
A s among alle oþer sterren . þe sonne
brȝtore is
A l so ssal heo anerþe ssyne . among oþer
men ywis
I n agod tyme ȝo worþ y bore . and
wonderlich also
V or noþer wiþinne hous no wipoute . þe
dede worþ ydo
¶ D uptac was þo douterles uor he nadde
neuer er none
I oyuol he was and glad ynou . uor he
bihet hure one
S upþe hit by uel þer after ward . þat on
oþer enchanteor wend
A nd of Duptac boȝte þis seruante as oure
louerd grace sende
V or þe wyf nolde neuere fine . ar it were
þerto ybroȝt
A c þe child þat was in hire wombe .
Duptac ne solde noȝt
V orþ he ladde þis womman . [þat he
had]de dere yboȝt
A nd weddede hure as his owe wif . and
volwede is þoȝt
S o þat aquene of þe londe . gret myd
childe was
A nd was upe þe point to habbe child .
wenne our louerd ȝef þat ca[s]
O f þe chanteor helet of este . wanne go[d]
tyme were
ȝ yf hit were ybore þe oþer sede . as my
boc me deþ lere
I nþe morwenynge to morwe . wanne me
may þe sonne yse
Þ er ne ssolde in al þe worlde . þe childes
þer beo
¶ Þ o bad þe quene vaste . þat it moste
[beo þo] ybore

Document 2

**East Midlands Collection Periodicals, Lin: Injunctions relating to Markyate
Priory (1442, English) from *Visitations of Religious Houses Vol III, A.D. 1436-
1449* , ed. A. Hamilton Thompson (Lincoln Record Society Volume 21; Lincoln,
1929), pp 230-231**

Translation by Pamela Doohan and Kathryn Summerwill

Second side

St Bridget

[The sorcerer makes a prophecy to
Duptak:] `For this woman shall bear a
daughter, who will shine so brightly among
all on earth in as glorious manner as the
sun is brighter than all the other stars; so
will she shine on earth among other
people. In good time she will be born, and
in a wonderful way too, for it will take
place neither indoors nor outside.' [later on
in the story, Bridget is born in the
doorway.] Duptak was then daughterless,
for he had never had any daughters, and
he was very happy and joyful because now
he had gained one. Later, it happened that
another sorcerer came and bought the
servant-girl from Duptak, as God sent
grace, because his wife would not give up
until this was brought about. But the
unborn child in her womb Duptak did not
sell. He [the sorcerer] took this woman, for
whom he had paid a high price, and
married her as his own wife, and followed
out [probably an error for fulfilled] his
intention. A queen of the country was
heavily pregnant and close to starting
labour when our Lord decreed it. Duptak
enquired of the magician when would be a
good time. The other replied, 'As my book
tells me, if it should be born tomorrow
morning when the sun is visible, there will
not be this child's equal in the whole
world.' Then the queen prayed hard that it
would be born then.

[No transcription – see image of printed document on the Wives, Widows and Wimples website]

By the grace of God, William, Bishop of Lincoln, to Our well beloved daughters in God the Prioress and convent of the Priory of Holy Trinity in the Wood, near Markyate, of the Order of Saint Benedict, of our diocese - health, grace and blessing. Following our visit to you and your said priory, We found by our preparatory inquisition that it is guilty of certain notable offences requiring due reformation. Therefore, for correction and reformation We send you these our injunctions, ordinances and commandments for you and your successors, and each one of your nuns, to be kept under penalty here beneath written.

Firstly, We find by our inquisition that every nun takes in each year, for all their sustenance and clothing, only food and ale and two marks [13s 4d] of money; also, because they are so industrious about providing and preparing their food and provisions, very often they are absent from the choir during divine service. And frequently when they are present, their thoughts are on preparing their food instead of upon the service and worship of God and on keeping a religious house. And therefore they hold many households, by which means, as we fear, comes many evils and causes of weakening of the body [of the convent]. Therefore We command, enjoin and ordain by your full assent that from henceforth you all eat together in one house, either in the refectory, infirmary or the Prioress's hall or chamber, so that no secular persons sit amongst the nuns during dinner or supper, and that during mealtimes you have scripture or saints' lives read aloud to you, during which reading you will give your attention and cease all idle talk. And that you, Prioress, and your successors, shall minister to [manage] your nuns' food and ale and other provisions necessary to your sustenance from the common goods of the house, out of one cellar and one kitchen, and that you pay every nun for their clothing allowance one noble [a gold coin worth 6s 8d] each year at the usual terms.¹

Also, We enjoin you, Prioress, under penalty of contempt, that every year you change your chaplain, and when you have to go out of the place [the convent] you take with you in your company a nun who is well-learned in religion, so that you have a witness of your good conversation.

Also, We enjoin you, Prioress, under the same penalty of contempt and cursing, that when your nuns visit their friends you do not permit them to be absent from Markyate for more than [number missing from text, but probably 'three'] days at the most, a reasonable time to go there and come back, and that they have with them a nun of holy orders and of respectable company.

Also, We enjoin you, Prioress, under the same penalty, that you do not allow your nuns to have any conversation with secular persons unless a nun of holy orders is present to hear and see what they say or do, and that you do not allow any of your nuns to receive or send letters, tokens or gifts unless you first see what is contained in the letters, and what those tokens and gifts are.

Also that you see to it diligently that none of your nuns who have before now fallen [into bad behaviour] by weakness have any opportunity or freedom to fall again.

Also that you compel your secular servants to speak honestly, not harshly or rebukingly, to your nuns, and that you have a respectable laundry woman to wash your nuns' clothes, at the expense of the house.

Also We charge and enjoin you, Prioress, under the same penalty, that as soon as you can and with all possible haste, take your nuns who are novices and of lawful age and who have stayed in religion over one year, to be professed to the religious order by a bishop with our authority. And until such time as they take the vow of the religious

order, you employ them at any work within or without your priory.

Also We enjoin you, Prioress, under the same penalty, that each night you have adequate light in the dormitory to help your nuns in rising for Matins.

Also We charge you, Prioress, etc., as per the tenth injunction against Ankerwyk. [a standard injunction against grants of corrodies and felling timber]

Also we enjoin you, Prioress, etc., as per the thirteenth injunction against the same place. [a standard injunction for providing twice-yearly accounts]

Also We enjoin you, Prioress and convent, under penalty of suspension from saying the divine service, and also under the penalty of exclusion from the ministrations of the Church, that from now on, especially on Sundays or other festival days, you do not receive or admit or allow any parishioners of [other] towns in the vicinity to hear any divine service in your church, because of injury, harm and peril of souls that may occur.

Furthermore, we admonish you, etc., as in the injunctions given against Legbourne, etc.

Given under Our seal, etc.

1. Possibly the quarter-days normally used for collecting rent: Christmas, Lady Day, Martinmas and Michaelmas.

Document 3

Me 3 D 2: Grant by Aubrey [de Vere, 1st] Earl of Oxford (c.1175, Latin) Transcription and translation by Kathryn Summerwill

Albericus Comes Oxenelis Omnibus hominibus suis **presentibus et** futuris tam francis **quam** Anglicis \$ **Salutem** Nouerit uniuersitas **uestra** me dedisse **et concessisse et** hac mea karta **confirmasse deo et sancte** Marie **et sancto** Johanni ewangeliste **et** monachis meis de Colun in puram **et perpetuam** elemosinam **tres** solidatas terre in stoches de mariagio comitisse **quas** Godingus tenuit **pro** salute mea **et** comitisse mee agnetis **et omnium** parentum **meorum et liberorum meorum** ad duos cereos parandos **et** cotidie ardendos **super** altare ubi celebratur missa de **sancta** Maria.
Et **uero** mea donatio **et concessio** firma habeatur kartam hanc **cum** testium annotationem **et sigilli nostri** appositione robaramus. Hiis testibus **Alberico** filio meo **et Roberto** fratre eius Nicholao Capellano meo **et Wilielmo** clerico de Colun **et Michaele** clerico **et Roberto** filio Baldewini . **et Roberto** de Campos **et Rogero** filio **Roberto et Wilielmo** fi lio fulconis **et** multis aliis\$

Aubrey, Earl of Oxford, sends greetings to all his men both present and in the future, whether French or English. Know you all, that I have given and conceded and by this my charter have confirmed to God and St Mary and St John the Evangelist, and my monks of Colun [Colne], in pure and perpetual alms, three shillings worth of land in Stoches [Stoke], out of the marriage portion of my Countess, which Godingus held, for the salvation of myself and my Countess Agnes and all my ancestors and my children, for the providing of two candles to be lit daily on the altar where the mass of St Mary is celebrated. And to make this my gift and concession strong, we have corroborated this charter with the annotation of witnesses and the fixing of our seal. Witnesses to this: Aubrey my son, and Robert his brother, and Nicholas my chaplain, and William the clerk of Colun, and Michael the clerk, and Robert son of Baldwin, and Robert de Campos, and Roger son of Robert, and William son of Fulk, and many others.

Documents 4 and 5

WLC/LM/1, f.1r: First page of a prayer book (second half of the 15th century, Latin). MS 250, f. 241v: Illuminated page from the Wollaton Antiphonal (first half of the 15th century, c.1430, Latin)

WLC/LM/7, inside front and back covers: Fragments of leaves from a Gradual with musical notation (14th century, Latin)

Images only